



U.S. Immigration
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Enforcement

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News Release

NATIONAL EVANGELIST CONVICTED OF IMMIGRATION FRAUD

First successful criminal trial prosecution for submitting fake religious worker applications

ALEXANDRIA, Va.-- A prominent national religious figure who hawked fake immigration expertise and documents to devout Spanish-speaking illegal immigrants was convicted by a federal jury here Friday in the first successful criminal trial prosecution of a person for submitting fraudulent religious worker visa applications.

Jose Vicente Mendez-Tenias, 49 and a native of Venezuela who represented himself at trial, was convicted of six counts of visa and immigration fraud and one count of harboring illegal aliens, announced United States Attorney Paul J. McNulty and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Special Agent-in-Charge Allan Doody, who leads ICE investigations in Washington, D.C.

The conviction marks the first successful prosecution of fake religious workers and is the result of an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The investigative leads came from Citizenship and Immigration Service's Texas Fraud Detection Unit, Office of Fraud Detection and National Security.

Mendez established a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization called the "Global Evangelism Task Force" and installed himself as the Executive Director. Mendez, who lives in the house at 16714 Friar Loop in Dumfries, Va., that serves as the organization's "headquarters," claims to hold a doctorate from the former Soviet Union and traveled around the United States to preach before church congregations.

He targeted Spanish-speaking audiences and often came into contact with illegal aliens. When speaking, Mendez --whose wife died in a car accident-- portrayed himself as a government conspiracy victim and as an expert immigration services consultant.

After preaching, Mendez would show off a portfolio of photographs of him with famous people to establish his legitimacy. He would then offer to help victims obtain legal immigration status.

"Once he gained a victim's confidence, he charged them \$2,110 to complete fraudulent I-360 religious worker petitions," said Doody. "In order to make it look like the illegal immigrants were religious workers, Mendez would provide fake supporting documents like education degrees and certificates from seminaries across the country and false employment histories. He even forged signatures on the documents."

Mendez even had his victims unwittingly fund their own fraudulent applications. It costs \$110 to file for the petition, so he'd have them submit that amount separately with the application and then he pocketed the remaining \$2,000.

At least 135 fraudulent applications were submitted to different U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services processing centers around the nation to mask the fraud. Mendez forged the same signature on at least 88 of the applications.

"Not a single one of the applications he submitted is worth the paper they're written on," said Doody. "He sought out illegal aliens in churches and used their status to exploit them. He told them a bunch of bunk about his organization, took their money, and left them with nothing but false hope."

Mendez also hired illegal aliens to work at his Global Evangelism Task Force headquarters and allowed illegal aliens to live in his home.

Mendez, who represented himself at trial, is scheduled to be sentenced Jan. 21 before Judge T.S. Ellis III. He faces a possible 65 years imprisonment for all counts.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Steven Mellin and Dennis Kennedy, along with Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregg Malawer.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.